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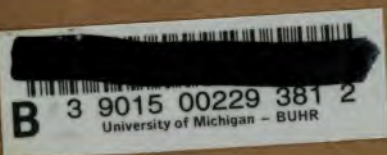
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# The Order of Nature Opposed to the Moral Life?

AN INAUGURAL ADDRESS DELIVERED IN THE  
UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW ON OCTOBER 23RD, 1894.



BY

HENRY JONES, M.A.,

PROFESSOR OF MORAL PHILOSOPHY IN THE UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW

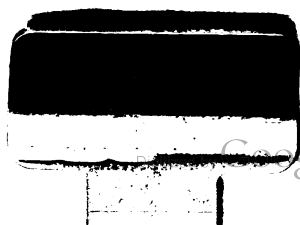


GLASGOW:

JAMES MACLEHOSE & SONS,

Publishers to the University.

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## IS THE ORDER OF NATURE OPPOSED TO THE MORAL LIFE?

I AM glad to believe, as I assume the responsibilities which have been laid upon me, that those of you who have known Mr. Caird will not withhold your sympathy from his successor. I do not intend to estimate either his services to this University, or his contribution to philosophic thought: the time for that has not yet come, I rejoice to say. The power of his spoken word is not yet spent, his work is still before him, and the light of his teaching is broadening as the years pass. And besides, the main conceptions on which he based his life and which he applied to the interpretation of man's duty and destiny, are not of a character that admits of a summary estimate. They can neither be refuted nor accepted in a day. Great thoughts live; they have a way of catching new meanings from the minds they mould, and their immortality is due to their power of changing with the times they educate. We do not order our conduct now according to the Ethics of Aristotle, nor our civic affairs according to the Republic of Plato; but we have not refuted them. Plato and Aristotle, Spinoza and Hume, Kant and Hegel are not there either for mere refutation, or for mere appropriation, any more than are the great poets, or the peaks of the Grampians. There is room for us to roam at large within the domain of their ideas, and we shall do wisely in being disciples of them all,



or, indeed, of any one of them. For the sincere thinker is not sensitive as to his own originality. He knows that great men cannot have disciples who are slaves. Only those who have bought their freedom at a great price, emancipating themselves from the limiting traditions of their day, can gain entrance into the world of immortal thoughts.

It was this loyalty, born of freedom, which characterized the attitude of Professor Caird towards the heroes of the world of thought. His old pupils know well how he sometimes sought to mitigate what he believed to be the exaggeration of their affection and youth, by insisting that the light which he had was borrowed. He never sought the appearance of independence by emphasizing the difference between his own views and those of the great men who preceded him. He looked in their writings, not for error, but for truth, citing their testimony and concealing his originality by finding his own thoughts in their works. He will not present himself to the minds of his pupils as a peak on a level plain, imposing on account of his isolation, but as standing in a group of heights and rejoicing in the great companionship. All of his students did not agree with his thoughts, some of them, perhaps, knew better; but I doubt if any one of them all would deny that he was worthy to stand in the noble line of Scottish succession which included David Hume, Adam Smith, and Thomas Reid; and some of us will be pardoned if we think that the tranquil strength of his manhood, and the serene beauty of his character, made him conspicuous amongst them all.

It would have been easier for me to take up the work which he has laid aside if it had been permitted to me to be guided by the experience of another of my past teachers. But the University has to mourn the loss of Professor Veitch. It is not for me to presume to give voice to its sorrow, nor to speak of the kindness, and manliness, and personal worth, the loyalty to the philo-

sophy of his native land, and the love of its poetry, which endeared him to successive generations of his students, and won for him the lasting regard of his countrymen.

And when I think of the still more recent loss we have sustained, I know not well how either to speak or to be silent. Those of us who were privileged to know the man as well as the teacher, and the teacher as well as the writer, know what a surpassingly great spirit has gone from us in the death of Professor Nichol. He stands for some of us as the type of that chivalry which defends the weak and innocent, because it finds its inspiration in their wrongs. His thoughts, springing from the ardent convictions of his sincere character, kindled in the utterance; and we shall think of him as of a star—his noble nature all one fire.

I am glad to come back to the old hearth, and to find my life-work in this city which to me was always large of heart; but you will understand if my eyes fall, first of all, upon the empty places.

But it is not easy, under any circumstances, for one who has been led in these days to occupy himself with philosophy to escape a certain sense of helplessness. The spectator of all time and all existence, now that time and existence have come to comprehend so much, presents a rather pathetic figure amongst his busy fellows. He is warned of the fate of 'the boy and the nuts,' and bidden to content himself with a smaller handful than 'the solution of the universe.' And the modern philosopher has taken the warning very much to heart. He confines himself for the most part to the exposition of a limited portion of the field of being, or even to critical monographs on the writings of his more adventurous predecessors. He insists, with a touch of nervous excitement, that he is not a 'system-monger,' that the last of these was Hegel, and that he has already been delivered over to the mob. He does not write a Metaphysic, nor pass

judgment upon the nature of things: he writes a Science instead—a Science of Psychology, a Science of Knowledge, and a Science of Morals.

But the need of a working theory of life, and therefore of the world which is its arena, is permanent, and all men must think their thoughts into some kind of a whole. And if the professional expounder of the universe, having discovered that the world is large and that his mind is small, seems at present to be laying aside his part, it is provided, for the delectation of mankind, that the part shall still be played. What survives of the natural man in the philosopher is sometimes gratified with the spectacle of a man of science taking up the ancient *rôle*. His garb is somewhat modernized, it is true. He does not speak of the nature of things, nor of ultimate essences and entities, but of the cosmos and its processes; and that which once was called ontology or metaphysics now appears under the new name of 'cosmological theory.'

But nothing is changed except the name. It is a notable fact that, while the writings of modern philosophers teem with confessions of ignorance, some scientific men, and those, I believe, not the greatest, 'cross the boundary of experimental evidence,' 'discern promises and potencies,' and 'claim for themselves and wrest from philosophy the whole domain of cosmological theory.' While philosophers have become conscious of their limits and taken to writing sciences, some scientific men have become conscious of their absence and taken to 'cosmology.' I do not think that we need care through what rift the light comes: I shall only say in passing that, on the whole, it is a somewhat dangerous undertaking, whether for philosophers or for scientific men, so 'to aggravate their voice' as to play all parts.

Last year, however, witnessed the new incursion of a great scientific man into the philosophic region, and it resulted in a judgment upon the ways of the world and

of man so powerful in utterance as to demand attention, and so startling in character as to deserve it.

It is said of an ancient sage that he went out and looked upon the universe and pronounced that 'All is one.' Professor Huxley went down to Oxford the other day and pronounced that All is two, and that there exists between them a strife which is inextinguishable. He tells us that "ethical nature, while born of cosmic nature, is necessarily at enmity with its parent." The interest of the declaration does not lie in its novelty, for dualisms, of one kind or another, are as old as reflective thought. Nor is it merely the strength and dignity of the writer's moral attitude which constrains our admiration. It is rather the splendid openness of mind which has enabled one of the greatest exponents of natural evolution to indicate limits to that way of thought, and to raise issues which are no less vital to the moral life of man than to evolution.

The main motive which, I conclude, inspired the remarkable lecture of Mr. Huxley on "Evolution and Ethics" was the desire to give pause to the easy optimism of our day, by revealing the strength and bitter hostility of the powers which are ranged against man's ethical endeavour. It may seem that the charge of easy optimism against an age so infected with the malady of thought as our own, and so familiar with pessimistic doctrines, is little deserved. But I do not think it is difficult to substantiate. The pessimism with which we are familiar is, in the main, a speculation which contents itself with railing at the world, stopping short, as Mr. Huxley shows, both of the 'sturdy vagrancy' of ancient times and of attempting to lessen the pains of sentient existence by turning its hand against itself. Even as a speculation it is for the most part confined to the more ephemeral writers. It has no philosophical expression in this country except in the form of translations: our great poets, though necessarily stricken with the sorrow of the world, sing, in the main,

songs of triumph ; and science is everywhere confident of itself and of the world. Professor Huxley finds the main cause of this confidence in the fact that "modern thought is making a fresh start where Indian and Greek philosophy set out." We are at the beginning of a new epoch ; and the dawn of day is always joyous. At each new beginning, whether of the individual or of the general life, humanity finds itself placed amidst friendly powers, and nature seems to be kind. The growth of experience, the influx of reflective thought, and especially the deepening of the moral consciousness of man, must, no doubt, bring with them a conviction of the antagonism between natural and moral existence. The ethical life, as it evolves, both sets a man against himself and pits him against the world. But on the whole, and so far, the thought of our day is impressed, not so much with the antagonism of nature and spirit, as with their mutual helpfulness. The practical tendency of the age is not towards asceticism. The consciousness of the unity and harmony which underlies our inner life is very deep. And, in like manner, when we look without and observe nature in the light of modern science, we see an ordered whole, yielding its treasures to the inquiring intelligence of man and laying its powers at the service of his purposes. We are prone to believe that if we could only know the world as it is and catch the direction of its tendency, we should be able to say with the poet—

"Oh world, as God has made it, all is beauty ;  
And knowing this is love, and love is duty."

The right of modern thought to this joyous conviction seems to be guaranteed by its conception of evolution. It is possible indeed that this conception is only a transitory instrument of *our* thought, destined yet to be laid aside like the other reflective media through which man has striven to make the world intelligible. There are already some indications that it has been applied with a

confidence which is not entirely justified, and that it may not operate on the lines projected for it by some of the sciences. Nevertheless there is little distrust of the conception itself: it is the dominant category of our day, and promises to maintain its sway till the day closes.

Now this conception of evolution is profoundly optimistic in character. It admits, no doubt, of the difference and antagonism of elements, of discontent and strife. But the main emphasis necessarily falls upon the identity beneath the differences, and upon the triumphant realization, through struggle and strife, of a single final purpose. Moreover, that final purpose lives and operates in the present; it is planted in the lowest form of being, giving it immeasurable dignity and worth; and it justifies every step in the process through which it achieves its end. If science has verily won the right to say that "'all the choir of heaven and furniture of earth' are the transitory forms of parcels of cosmic substance wending along the road of evolution," then we must regard the world not only as a universal order, but as an order which ascends towards some higher form of being, in obedience to an inward necessity.

Now, ordinary thought is one-sided, and rarely able to hold before itself the opposing aspects of a concrete truth. And when the view of the world as an ascending order gains possession of the common mind, the conditions of that ascent are too easily overlooked. It is forgotten that evolution, even in the natural sphere, gives assurance of the higher stage of being, *only* if the lower is radically transformed. And as there is no form of being so low but that it strives to persevere in existence, the struggle is inevitable. In the domain of ethical life that transformation necessarily involves a consciousness of imperfection and all its consequent pains. In this region there is no triumph except through failure, no progress except through a discontent which generates a continuous struggle, no stepping-stones except the dead

self. And experience teaches us with convincing emphasis that the self always dies hard. Hence, except through the war of man against himself, and through the consciousness, not only of the worth of the moral ideal, but of its authoritative condemnation of present achievement, moral progress is not possible. So that the conception of evolution which justifies the world's process as a whole, condemns each successive step within it; and the idea which represents the final purpose of the world as realizing itself in the lowest of all creatures, also represents all that is as that which ought *not* to be, and projects the attainment of the ideal into a future which always recedes.

Nor is it 'ordinary thought' alone which in our day seems to have ignored this aspect of evolution, and forgotten the conditions of the universal victory. I am not entirely confident that some of our best writers on ethics have not allowed the stable security of the movement of the cosmic process to obscure the terms on the fulfilment of which its triumph depends. "There is," says Professor Huxley, "another fallacy which appears to me to pervade the so-called 'ethics of evolution.' It is the notion that because, on the whole, animals and plants have advanced in perfection of organization by means of the struggle for existence and the consequent 'survival of the fittest,' therefore men in society, men as ethical beings, must look to the same process to help them towards perfection." Modern ethics has discovered, I can almost say for the first time, the relations which bind the individual to his fellows, and which make him, as he never was before, a member of a moral partnership which contains the living and the dead. He is now known as the heir of the achievements of his people, and the organ of its far-reaching purposes. He has not to confront the task of living a moral life in the weakness and nakedness of individualism, but the pulse and the power of the whole beat within him. If he has learnt for the first time that all men are his brethren, and

that his duty is not to save himself but man, the sense of his privilege has received the same illimitable expansion. If it is his duty to save the world, the world is there to help him to perform it.

Further, idealists have helped the propounders of the ethics of evolution to bring the moral ideal down from the upper air of a super- or trans-natural region. They have represented the Good as a power which is in the world, incarnating itself not only in individuals, but in ethical institutions—in the family, and the church, and the state, and, more latently, even in the industrial organism, which, in its way, alleviates the conditions of man's life, and make for his physical well-being.

Beside the ethical writers and the philosophers, the poets and historians of the Victorian age have also combined to teach us the immanence and the immortality of the good. With no less clearness and wholeness of conviction than Darwin has taught the evolution of the animal kingdom, Carlyle has declared that in the kingdom of man the only Might is Right. So that we have been led to believe, in contrast with the deists and unconscious sceptics of the previous century, that the power which is making for righteousness is *in the world*; and, in contrast with the earlier age of Puritanism, with its intense moral individualism, we have been led to trust the cosmic process, and to believe that within the wide range of its long history it has secured, and will secure in the future, not only the Survival of the Fittest but also the Triumph of the Best.

Now, it is not strange that the truth thus insisted upon by scientific men, moralists, philosophers, poets, and historians should take a deep hold of the general mind. Conscious of our debt and dependence, regarding ourselves as members of a universal order, and confiding in the sureness of its onward movement, it is easy for us to regard ourselves as mere temporary organs of its permanent functions, and to view the moralization of the



world as a process which moves inevitably towards its goal. Now that the continuity of society and its organic oneness have come upon us with the freshness of a new revelation and the authority of indisputable truth, it is difficult to realize that the ethical struggle is essentially a lonely one, and that, after all, the moral individual is set to work out his destiny, and the world's through his own, in that strict isolation which implies individual and undivided responsibility.

It is against this pleasant belief and passive trust in the cosmic process that Professor Huxley has set himself, for he considers that they are not warranted by the facts. "A pertinacious optimism conceals from us the actual state of the case, prevents us from seeing that cosmic nature is no school of virtue, but the headquarters of the enemy of ethical nature, and that the cosmos works through the nature of man, not for righteousness, but against it." This student of nature and her ways finds her perfect as a mechanism, and so beautiful as to be worthy to engage, in eternal constancy, the spiritual affections of the contemplative seer. But among the manifestations of her "cosmopoietic energy, where it works through sentient beings, is that which we call pain or suffering." "Whether we look within us or without us, evil stares us in the face on all sides; if anything is real, pain and sorrow and wrong are realities." "Pain and sorrow knock at our doors more loudly than pleasure and happiness, and the prints of their heavy footsteps are less easily effaced. Before the grim realities of practical life the pleasant fictions of optimism vanish."

For pain and sorrow and wrong are not accidental intruders into a scheme of things otherwise benevolent. They are not strangers making a temporary sojourn with us, nor alien elements which we can hope to see eliminated with the advance of evolution. "If the world is full of pain and sorrow; if grief and evil fall, like the rain, upon both the unjust and the just; it is because, like the rain,

they are links in the endless chain of natural causation by which past, present, and future are indissolubly connected." "Pain is the baleful product of evolution itself, increasing in quantity and in intensity with advancing grades of animal organization, until it attains its highest level in man. Further, the consummation is not reached in man, the mere animal; nor in man, the whole or half savage; but only in man, the member of an organized polity." "Civilization in its advance has stimulated the senses, pampered the emotions, endlessly multiplied the sources of pleasure, widened the intellectual field, added to the fleeting present those old and new worlds of the past and future, wherein men dwell the more the higher their culture." But the blessings of culture are not unmixed. "That very sharpening of the sense and that subtle refinement of emotion, which brought such a wealth of pleasure, were fatally attended by a proportional enlargement of the capacity for suffering; and the divine faculty of imagination, while it created new heavens and new earths, provided them with the corresponding hells of futile regret for the past and morbid anxiety for the future." Finally comes "the inevitable penalty of over-stimulation, the stale and flat weariness when man delights not, nor woman neither; when all things are vanity and vexation; and life seems not worth living except to escape the bore of dying." The world is making for misery.

In the next place, it seems to make for misery through wrong. Mr. Huxley thinks it impossible for us 'to look the world in the face and bring the course of nature into harmony with even the elementary requirements of the ethical ideal of the just and the good.' "If there is one thing plainer than another, it is that neither the pleasures nor the pains of life in the animal world are distributed according to desert." Indeed, how can dumb beasts, necessarily guided by their native instincts, deserve pain at all? And, again, if we turn from animal to human

life, we find "that the violator of ethical rules constantly escapes the punishment he deserves; that the wicked flourishes like a green bay tree, while the righteous begs his bread; that the sins of the fathers are visited upon the children; that in the realm of nature ignorance is punished just as severely as wilful wrong; and that thousands upon thousands of innocent beings suffer for the crime, or the unintentional trespass of one."

But if we turn from the results of the operations of the cosmic process to the law which guides its movement, we shall recognize further depths of injustice in its ways. For cosmic nature is not merely indifferent to moral ends. It is not merely that

"Streams will not curb their pride  
The just man not to entomb;  
Nor lightnings go aside  
To give his virtues room;

Nor is the wind less rough, which blows a good man's barge.

"Nature with equal mind  
Sees all her sons at play;  
Sees man control the wind,  
The wind sweep man away;

Allows the proudly-riding, and the foundering bark."

*(Empedocles on Etna.)*

But, in Mr. Huxley's view, the necessary indifference of a process which is unconscious is connected with a bias towards evil which, although also unconscious, characterizes all its movements. Cosmic nature makes, "not for righteousness, but against it"; she puts a premium upon a course of conduct which, in all respects, is opposed to what is ethically best. For nature rewards, with the only gifts she has, namely, life and the means of its maintenance, those beings who are most successful in 'the struggle for existence.' And the things which "constitute the essence of the struggle for existence are the unscrupulous seizing upon all that can be grasped, the tenacious holding of all that can be kept." By complete obedience to

nature's law, by catching more perfectly the direction of her unconscious tendency, man "has worked his way to the headship of the sentient world, and become the superb animal which he is." In him, therefore, cosmic nature finds the goal of her illimitable endeavour. He is her master-piece and the fullest expression of her power and meaning. And how is he characterized? By qualities "which he shares with the ape and the tiger," but, as a more perfect animal, shares more largely; "by his exceptional physical organization; his cunning, his sociability, his curiosity, and his imitateness; his ruthless and ferocious destructiveness when his anger is roused by opposition."

If this supreme combination of strength and cunning and greed be, indeed, the end to which the cosmic process moves, we can well sympathize with Mr. Huxley when he speaks of "the unfathomable injustice of the nature of things": "Brought before the tribunal of ethics, the cosmos stands condemned; the microcosmic atom has found the illimitable macrocosm guilty." Moralists and poets and historians have verily been rash in entrusting to it the task of moralizing man; and it was time that another power should be called into the field.

What, then, is that power? Who shall 'check' the cosmic process, convert "its ruthless self-assertion into self-restraint, and, instead of the thrusting aside and the treading down of all competitors, bring mutual respect and helpfulness?"—"on earth peace, and good-will towards men." Mr. Huxley answers that it is ethical, or civilized man. He is well aware that it is an "audacious proposal thus to pit the microcosm against the macrocosm, and to set man to subdue nature to his higher ends." He acknowledges that "ethical nature may count upon having to reckon with a tenacious and powerful enemy as long as the world lasts." He knows also that "men in society are undoubtedly subject to the cosmic process," that is, that they have a traitorous enemy within, as well as a

tenacious one without. Nevertheless, such is his trust in man's endowment, that he looks to the issue of this unparalleled contest not without hope. The laws and customs which man has established, the institutions and politics he has founded, the arts he has invented, the sciences he has discovered, may "modify the conditions of existence." "And much may be done to change the nature of man himself. The intelligence which has converted the brother of the wolf into the faithful guardian of the flock, ought to be able to do something towards curbing the instincts of savagery in civilized man."

Now, it is evident that, within the limits of this lecture, even were there no other and more insuperable limits, it is not possible to deal adequately with the great issues which have thus been raised. These are, in the main, reducible to two, each of them, as Mr. Huxley recognizes, involving in a vital way "the bearing of modern scientific thought on the problems of morals and politics." The first of these, on which I shall merely touch, is the relation of the cosmic process to happiness; the second is its relation to moral goodness.

It is hardly necessary for me to say that I concur with the condemnation of that optimism which denies the reality, or minimizes the significance, of the pain and the suffering in the sentient world. But I must say, on the other hand, that if optimism is to be refuted, justice must be done to the truth which it contains, and its significance must be exhausted. And when we review the optimistic systems which have been elaborated by philosophers, or suggested by poets and historians, I believe we shall find not one which rests its case on the denial of the reality of pain and suffering, or which attempts an *immediate* justification of the order of nature. If optimists have held that "the Real is the Rational," or that "Whatever is, is right," they have done so only because, by that very principle of evolution which has been employed to establish pessimism, they have sought to explain the

present evil as the condition of the attainment of a higher good. They have regarded the pain and the suffering as means, and as necessary means, to ethical progress. Taking the world as they find it, and refusing to give the rein to an imagination which would, at its ease, construct worlds without respect to the conditions of their possibility, they believe, in the first place, that much of the suffering which is in the world is meant to teach the evil of ignorance and sin; and, in the second place, that even if moral progress can only come through an agony of endeavour, in which, in some way or other, the whole creation takes part, it is still worth attaining at the price. They

"Welcome each rebuff

That turns earth's smoothness rough,

Each sting that bids nor sit nor stand, but go!

Be our joys three parts pain!

Strive, and hold cheap the strain;

Learn, nor account the pang; dare, never grudge the throe."

The hypothesis of the moral purpose of nature may be wrong; it is conceivable that there is no valid conclusion from the necessities of thought, which demand and presuppose unity and find their impulse in it, to the harmony of the nature of things. It is certain that the application of this hypothesis to the data of experience is most imperfect, and will remain so as long as human knowledge is incomplete. Who could show, for instance, that the preying of one species of animals upon another contributes to the ethical evolution of any one? Or who is morally better because the wolf tracks, and sooner or later brings down, the hunted deer? But whether the defect lies in the hypothesis itself, and is therefore irremediable; or whether it lies in its imperfect application, and will be removed with every advance of human knowledge towards the conception of an organic unity, so vital and inward as to make all beings participators in the final good, it is certain that in all cases

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alike this hypothesis cannot be disproved by any of the pessimistic considerations advanced against it.

There is a fundamental ineptitude in the controversy between these rival theories, which makes that controversy both futile and interminable. For they pass judgment upon the nature of things from points of view, and by reference to criteria, which are entirely different. Every pessimism, known to me, is hedonistic in principle, assumes that the proper object of life is to escape from sorrow, and condemns the world from the point of view of the emotions. Every optimism, known to me, has for its principle and supreme criterion a good which is not definable in terms of pleasure, even though it may bring pleasure in its train. In a word, optimism justifies the world from one point of view, and pessimism condemns it from another; and the controversy between them can have neither value nor significance till they have agreed upon a common standard. The optimist must convince the pessimist that a world filled with pleasant emotions is not necessarily an ideal world, or admit that, if it is, man has lost the way in seeking it by the road of intellectual and moral evolution; or else the pessimist must convince his opponent that moral goodness has not this supreme worth; and show that vice and virtue, as we call them, enmity, malice, and hate, justice and peace and love, have no value except as instruments for procuring pleasure, or for escaping from pain. Until this be shown, the optimist, while acknowledging that

“Sorrow is hard to bear, and doubt is slow to clear,”

may claim that, after all, the testimony of the moral consciousness means something; and that as long as virtuous conduct brings the reward of virtuous character, and evil action brings, with a necessity against which there is no appeal, the punishment and degradation of being bad, the ways of the world, even though they tend to misery, are not unfathomably unjust. *FP*

But I do not believe that there is any need to contemplate such a problem ; for there is no such irreconcilable discrepancy between happiness and goodness. The greater, if we could only fix upon it, will include the less ; and the world, even though it is making for goodness, is not necessarily making also for misery. The contention of Mr. Huxley that the advance of civilization means increased pain seems to me to be ill-founded ; to be due, in fact, to that fallacy of the reflective consciousness which is so prone to project the shadow of its own sorrows upon the world. That the *capacity* for suffering increases with the evolution of life is beyond doubt ; but so does the capacity for joy. Before the cosmic process evolved organs of hearing, there were no auditory pains ; but there was no music. And I, for one, cannot envy the deaf. Prior to the emergence of reflective thought there was no doubt ; but there was no truth. And I cannot envy the ignorant. It is possible that we have overrated the triumphs of modern civilization, whether in the sphere of knowledge or in that of our practice and civil polity ; but I am not able to doubt that, on the whole, it has "ministered to the comforts and diminished the sufferings of mankind." What can be done for the more pathetic sufferings of the animal kingdom, I dare not venture to prognosticate. But nowhere do I see a larger hope, or surer promise, of a still greater amelioration of the conditions of life than in that sensitiveness to the pains and wrongs, not only of failed humanity but also of the brutes, which is perhaps the last and best ethical achievement of our time. Sympathy is expanding downwards ; and may we not hope that man, as he grows morally better, may find means to make the world happier, and that the Will will find the way ?

But I turn to the second and still more important question, namely, that of the relation between the cosmic process and moral goodness. Is it true, as Mr. Huxley



contends, that the natural order of the world is opposed to the virtuous life, and that if man is to be good, he must be good in spite of the nature of things. If it is, then I must confess my inability to share the confidence, chastened as it is, with which Mr. Huxley awaits the issue of the contest between these foes.

It is not because the odds against man are too great. I am prepared to believe that the true and the good, if you give them time—and natural evolutionists do not stint us time—are always in a majority. My difficulty comes from another quarter. I do not see how the ethical and the cosmic processes, as represented by Mr. Huxley, can meet on any common arena to make trial of their strength. It would baffle both science and philosophy to represent in intelligible terms any collision whatsoever between a force which is purely natural or unconscious, and a force which is intelligent and moral. Natural philosophy does not recognize amidst its forms of energy that which we call ethical, nor seek the mechanical equivalent of a virtuous impulse or a strong will. And even biology, with all its anthropomorphic propensities, would hesitate to attribute to the lower creation that conception of a good to be pursued or rejected, without which no motive can be ethical. Such a course would be equivalent to the denial of the cosmic process in Mr. Huxley's sense of the word, and to making the sphere of morality co-extensive with that of being. But if science stops short of moralizing nature, it is equally evident that no moral theory can so naturalize the phenomena of self-consciousness as to make the conflicting motives of an intelligent being purely physical. And yet, from the one side or the other, these powers must be brought together, if nature is either to thwart or to further the moral ends of man. Without some element of community between them, the ethical process could not combat or check the cosmic process.

But, on Mr. Huxley's theory, no such element is pro-

vided. Between the natural process, which culminates in the savage, and the moral process, which begins with civilized man, there is a complete solution of continuity. The law which has guided the cosmos up to the point at which it produces non-ethical man undergoes a fundamental change. Having been moving during its whole course and in obedience to unconscious necessity, *against* righteousness, the cosmos, on the emergence of ethical man, suddenly takes a thought and strives to mend. It transforms the deepest principle of its activity; passes from self-assertion to self-restraint; and substitutes for the ruthless method of exterminating weakness and innocence by guile and strength, the ways of justice and mercy and peace. It was natural, therefore, that Mr. Huxley's critics should have been led to doubt whether he regarded ethical man as the product of the cosmic process; or whether, on the contrary, he maintained a theory of spiritual abiogenesis, or attributed the moral world to spontaneous generation, setting in somewhere between savage and civilized man. But in his later utterances Mr. Huxley has removed this doubt as to his view. Ethical man does not stand outside of the nature of things, though *he* is moral and *it* is not. Morality is not a human invention, but in the last resort is, like all else that man does, or is, the result of a natural process. "The ethical nature," he tells us, "is born of the cosmic nature, although it is necessarily at enmity with its parent."

Now, it is well known that modern biological theory sets no very narrow limits to the possibility of spontaneous variation. At any point some new and unexpected departure may take place. But there is none to be compared in significance and abruptness to this; no metamorphosis from one natural form to another can parallel the change from nature to spirit. And it seems to me that if evolution implies *any* continuity, it can scarcely show how a purely natural could pass into a

moral order, or how "the unfathomable injustice of the nature of things" could issue in the novel and surpassingly great conception of moral goodness and in the will to realize it. It seems to me that we must either deny that the cosmic process is purely natural, and find in it, even from the first, some innate reference to the ideal purposes of man; or else, that we must abandon the conception of evolution.

In this extremity, Mr. Huxley elects to remain loyal to the idea of evolution; and he endeavours to mitigate the abruptness and the violence of the change in the direction and character of the cosmic process, by making use of man's powers of mimicry and sympathy as intermediaries. These powers, he believes, have a natural basis, for they arise from organic necessities; and, by a process of moral association, they develop into the ethical relations which constitute civilized society. I believe it would not be difficult to show that these instruments of association are as little adequate to the use to which they are put in the ethical sphere, as they are in the sphere of knowledge. But, in any case, if nature *has* these powers of sympathy, or even the possibility of them, then she is not correctly described as given over to the exterminating method of the struggle for existence. On the contrary, the illimitable macrocosm which Mr. Huxley had pronounced "Guilty" is found, if we give it time, to be engaged in evolving a moral order; and, in addition to the ape and tiger propensities, there is in it at least the potency of altruistic impulses, and the dim beginnings, in animals and savages, of mutual affection and regard.

Thus the attempt of Mr. Huxley to represent the ethical process as continuous with, and emerging from the natural process, culminates in throwing doubt upon the truth of his first characterization of nature. It would seem that the method of extirpating all for the sake of one, even though that one should be the most superb of animals, is not nature's only method. Indeed, it is

not difficult to show that a process which, with a single eye, seeks to evolve the fittest *only*, must defeat its own end. At the very worst the fittest needs the less fit for food. "If," as Mr. Leslie Stephen has pithily put the matter, "the wolf ate all the sheep, and the sheep ate all the grass, the result would be the extirpation of all the sheep and all the wolves, as well as all the grass."

Were it any part of my present purpose to examine the biological view of evolution, I should have to indicate the difficulties I find in its lineal or spiral character. Probably, as Lord Kelvin and others have averred, there is no time for this ascent from species to species up to man. But, whether there is time or not, it is plain that a theory which relies on accidental variation to begin every new movement towards completer organization, and which again relies on accidents to thwart that evolution of all into one, and to account for the continued existence of any being *besides* the fittest, is best called agnostic. There is no more suitable name for a doctrine which, just at the crucial points, inserts a power which we can designate only by a term that simply signifies ignorance.

Moreover, if we look around and observe the endless multiplicity of forms of life still extant, we must pronounce this method of extirpation as singularly unsuccessful. And if we examine the relations which still persist between the different species, we shall be forced to admit that, as a matter of fact, "the struggle," as Mr. Stephen says, "implies reciprocal interdependence in a countless variety of ways. There is not only a conflict but a system of tacit alliances." And how is it to be proved that nature cares more for the conflict than for the alliances, or maintains the alliances for the sake of the conflict, when all that is given us is merely the fact that she does provide for both? The wonderful variety of animal and vegetable forms which lends

to the realm of nature so much interest and beauty, the fact that this variety, although within it there are all kinds of weak and defenceless beings, has maintained itself through the endless ages of internecine struggle, might justify us at least in asking whether it is not possible that the course which nature has actually followed does not give us the best clue to the law which dominates her movement. Is it not possible that nature's deepest law provides not merely, nor primarily, for the single blessedness of the fittest survivor; but for the evolution and maintenance of an equilibrium, of a complex organism of interrelated species, in which the innocent and the helpless have their permanent place, no less than the self-assertive and strong?

But I leave this matter to the biologists; and I have mentioned it only in order to suggest that it is somewhat premature to apply to ethics principles which, in their own legitimate sphere, seem so insecure. The main point I should like to make clear is, that the problem of man's ethical life is not affected by the view which may be taken of a cosmic process that is purely natural. Even if it be true that the order of nature is an equipoise of opposing tendencies, the problem of morality remains precisely where it was. I may go further and say, that the jubilant optimism which persuades itself that something analogous to love is, amidst many defeats, slowly working its way to the throne of things, contributes nothing to the solution of the ethical problem. Surely a cosmic process, so long as it is conceived to be purely natural, can neither help nor hinder the ethical endeavour of man. Nor does the view we take of such a process justify us in drawing either pessimistic or optimistic conclusions. Pessimism is no partial condemnation of the world of being, nor is optimism a partial justification. On the contrary, before these rival theories issue their sentence of guilty or not guilty, they pass under review the whole realm of reality. But it is not difficult to show

that the conception of a whole, which can be either acquitted or condemned, is beyond the compass of dualistic views that start by cleaving asunder the natural and the moral worlds.

And this consideration, I venture to say, reveals a fundamental fallacy which vitiates the whole conception of the antagonism of the natural order to the moral life of man. In other words, I find Mr. Huxley dealing with a fragment as if it were a whole, and passing judgment upon a mental abstraction, as if it were a real object. He treats the cosmic process up to ethical man as if it were purely natural, having neither part nor share in man's moral achievement, except in so far as it supplies him with the natural basis of his life. With the production of the physical organism which has, as its highest function, an intelligent and moral life, the part which nature plays ends. After she has endowed man with intelligence she has done with him. From his moral and intellectual purposes she stands aside. The moral order, once man has been physically and mentally equipped, is exclusively the product of his activity. Thinking and willing, the interpretation of the world and the ethical melioration of its ways, are tasks which man, when once evolved, performs in his own strength. He, the microcosm, gets no help from the macrocosm, but, as we are told, is pitted against it; he has to "combat and check the cosmic process, and bend the Titan to his will."

Now, it seems to me that this is to attribute too much to man and too little to the world. Perhaps I may succeed in making my objection clear in this way. I find that two alternatives are placed before us by modern writers on this question. We are, on the one hand, asked to regard nature as indifferent to man's ethical life. "The cosmic process has no sort of relation to moral ends," Mr. Huxley tells us: it is a *natural* process, and therefore, in strictness, neither good nor bad, nor helpful to either. And the macrocosm, which man is somewhat

grandiloquently called upon to combat, turns out to be, not the physical powers that hold their sway in the natural world, but the selfish propensities which survive in himself. Put plainly, the struggle falls within man, and it is the old struggle of his lower and higher nature; and man is not really called upon to check the laws of matter or of organic life. The cosmic process goes its own way in obedience to laws which man cannot change, and which he does not need to change in order to be good. The natural order existed long before intelligence and its moral and other purposes appeared upon the scene. Even if he is the outcome of the cosmic process he is simply a splendid after-thought. What went before him remains, after his appearance, simply what it was, namely, a sphere which exists apart from all reference to intelligence, and which is simply natural.

The other alternative is that which makes nature implicitly human. Having within her the power to evolve man, she must contain from the first, at least in some dim potential way, the qualities of man. Nothing can, by the way of evolution, be elicited from nature except that which is in her. Nature is not natural, she is spirit in the making. What she really is she shows in her highest product, just as the acorn reveals its nature in the full-grown oak.

The alternatives then are these: (1st) the cosmic process is purely natural, and has no reference whatsoever to ethical ends; (2nd) the cosmic process is at root not natural at all, but intellectual and moral, revealing itself fully only in man.

I believe that neither of these alternatives is true. Facts do not warrant us to treat nature either as moral or as indifferent to man's moral ends. As long as man is so distinguished from the world as he is, we cannot attribute to it his qualities. However loyal we remain to the unity of being, we cannot wisely ignore or minimize the difference between rational life, and processes which

are organic or physical. But, on the other hand, we cannot be faithful to facts if we deny to nature all participation in the processes and achievements of the human spirit. Nature does not love, nor hate, nor think, if, as Mr. Huxley does, we use the term to represent what exists apart from man ; and so long as nature does not think and know, she is not moral. But, on the other hand, man does not think or know *except by the help of nature*. In fact, knowledge and morality are not the achievements of *either* man *or* of the world in which he lives. Into each of these products both enter as indispensable factors. If, after endowing man with the most consummate intelligence, unintelligent nature stood aside and left him to himself, man would be absolutely helpless. Formal thought is empty, we say, and *a priori* knowledge is worthless. I would add that they are both alike impossible. The thought we know is so dominated by its content as to be simply its expression ; the knowledge we have is so ruled by its data, which somehow flow into us through the pores of sense, as to be nothing except these data rendered intelligible. Nature must furnish the facts, as well as evolve the interpreting intelligence ; and, in so far as she furnishes the facts the product, namely knowledge, is as much hers as it is man's. The cosmic process, if it is to produce apples, must evolve the apple-tree ; but it must also help the tree to bear its fruit. Plant it in vacuo, though instinct in every leaf and twig and rootlet with its own vital energy, it will remain barren. And what answer should we give to the question whether nature or the apple-tree brings forth the fruit ? This, I conjecture, that the question is absurd. Both are necessary : it is the hasty and incomplete abstraction of ordinary thought which attributes all to the tree and forgets the indispensable co-operation of the sun and earth and air, and the whole natural system of which the tree is a part. The fruit is, strictly speaking, nature's product *in* the tree, and *only* in the tree.



If you can avoid calling the simile crude, I should say that nature grows ideas just as she grows apples. She needs the powers of man, and evolves them in order to produce ideas, just as she needs and evolves the apple-tree to grow its fruit. But an intelligence in vacuo is as helpless as a tree that is rooted neither in earth nor sea. Whatever man does nature helps him. She is a partner in all his projects, although she knows none of them. Her powers enter as factors, though only as factors, into all the products of his intelligence and moral will. She is not herself either moral or immoral; but, inasmuch as morality presupposes knowledge, and inasmuch as knowledge presupposes a world of facts as well as an interpreting intelligence, the moral achievements of man are also nature's. The data which nature furnishes attend every step which man's intelligence takes; indeed, his intelligence is her instrument for self-expression. What answer, then, should we give to the question whether the subject or the object knows? The same answer as we would give if we were asked whether the breath or the flute gives forth the music. If the plant cannot bear its fruit except by means of the natural system which has produced it, no more can man attain that self-consciousness which is implied in the very possibility of a moral life, except by interaction with the world. In fact, subject and object, the self and the not-self, the world and man, are partners in the great enterprise of knowledge and goodness; and whatever is done by either of the partners is done by the whole firm.

Indeed, the metaphor is inadequate to express the inwardness and intimacy of their relation. For, in this case, neither element can exist apart from the other. Nature is man's counterpart, the other aspect of his very being. And, on the other hand, the reference to mind is essential to the very conception of a possible world. Natural science is, indeed, for its own purposes quite justified in treating an atom, or a form of physical

energy, as if it were not related to mind. But it cannot be denied that one of the properties they possess is that of being intelligible. They are natural facts, it is true, and dominated by necessary laws; and I can attribute to them, in the absence of all evidence, neither love nor hate, nor any moral or intellectual quality. But they are also capable of helping man to think, the other aspect of his reason; guides to knowledge, and partners in his progress. Or, are we to believe that the order of nature, in all its unspeakable grandeur, is some web of subjective ideas woven by man purely from within? I would not minimize the significance of that intelligence which has lifted man to the throne of nature; but I do not believe that the intelligence of man, if nature stood aloof, could ever strike out the original idea of the slender loveliness of the growing birch, or invent the conception of the wintry earth, or of the

"Spring-wind, like a dancing psaltress, passing  
Over its breast to waken it."

We have not projected outwards, or invented by sheer force of imagination the "rare verdure," which

"Buds tenderly upon rough banks, between  
The withered tree-roots and the cracks of frost,  
Like a smile striving with a wrinkled face."

The majesty of the natural world is the result of a combined endeavour. And the still more solemn majesty of the world of goodness is the product of the interaction of man with man, and of all men with nature. Hence the cosmic process which contributes to these surpassingly great ends, guiding the struggling intellect at every step, furnishing it with all it owns, casting before him all its inexhaustible wealth, is not man's foe, but his ever-constant friend, attending him in all his battles, and sharing in all his victories. But the cosmic

process of which Mr. Huxley speaks is absolutely deprived of this relation to the spiritual activities of man, and robbed of its chief glory of being the light of our seeing; and I am glad to think that the empty eye-socket which is left behind by him, is only a phantom created by abstract thought.



